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Contact: Troy Kitch

### Morbid Obesity Surgery: What You Need to Know

Morbid obesity is an epidemic that affects millions of people worldwide. While there are several non-surgical and surgical methods to treat this serious condition, surgery is a popular choice among many patients. While TRICARE currently covers three types of surgery to treat morbid obesity, TRICARE Europe officials stress that beneficiaries should explore non-surgical alternatives before pursuing these options. Since TRICARE only provides coverage if certain criteria are met, preauthorization is also required prior to any surgery.

"I want our beneficiaries to be informed consumers," said Linda Glynn, Regional Nurse Case Manager for TRICARE Europe, "Morbid obesity surgeries are serious procedures that can have serious risks and side-effects. Once people undergo such a surgery, they must also commit to many difficult lifestyle changes. If they don't follow through, they may face even greater health problems. That's a lot to consider. I urge beneficiaries to take the time to do some research on the Internet and talk to others who have had surgery before they pursue this option."

**What is morbid obesity?** *Morbid Obesity means the body weight is more than 100 pounds over ideal weight for height and bone structure, and such weight is associated with severe medical conditions known to have higher mortality rates in association with morbid obesity; or the body weight is 200 percent or more of ideal weight for height and bone structure. The term "morbid" in this context means the obesity is associated with disease.*

TRICARE Europe covers gastric bypass, gastric stapling, and gastroplasty surgeries to treat morbid obesity. While Glynn notes that these treatments can be very effective, she said that surgery is the final step after all other options have been exhausted.

If a beneficiary decides to pursue a surgical solution, TRICARE Europe will evaluate the request to determine TRICARE coverage. This preauthorization process is not intended to be a burden, but is a tool to help people navigate through a complicated process and a method to ensure that people do not get stuck with the bill for a costly operation. It is also a fair process, Glynn said. If a patient is denied authorization to receive morbid obesity surgery, he or she may appeal the decision.

“Our primary goal is to be advocates for the patient,” Glynn said.

Beneficiaries may get more information about morbid obesity and available treatments from their Primary Care Manager. Local TRICARE Service Center representatives are available to discuss the preauthorization process as well as TRICARE benefits. Glynn notes, however, that often the best place to start is with available support services at the base/post level.

“Each Service has health and wellness programs and nutritionists that are available to help,” she said, “We want to empower people to take ownership of their health. Opting for morbid obesity surgery is a major decision that doesn’t end with the surgery — it’s a lifelong commitment. It’s really important to take the time to explore all of your options.”

***Editor’s Note:** Just like the civilian sector, obesity is an epidemic that is prevalent within the U.S. Defense Health Program. TRICARE Europe routinely receives requests for morbid obesity surgeries from locations throughout the theater.*

*Linda Glynn, TRICARE Europe Regional Nurse Case Manager, is available for media interview upon request. Contact*

*TRICARE Europe Public Affairs for more information.*